

1       1. An apparatus for connecting buyers and sellers of products and services comprising:

2              a comprehensive directory of companies;

3              a user-maintained database of companies selected from said comprehensive

4              directory; and,

5              service-brokering tools for interacting with said directory of companies and user-

6              maintained database of companies, wherein said service-brokering tools comprise:

7                  contacting means for buyers and sellers to contact one another over a

8                  network;

9                  searching means for said buyers and sellers to search said directory and

10                 said user-maintained database based on geographical boundaries; and

11                 branding means for defining visual attributes that can be used to

12                 dynamically generate a branded Web site

13                 □

14       2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said service-brokering tools further comprise:

15                 an internal mechanism for a Web server to infer a private label interface from an

16                 initial network request, URL or IP address

17                 □

18       3. The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said service-brokering tools further comprise:

19                 a partner object that can persist and cache said private label interface information

20                 for a Web server.

21                 □

22       4. The apparatus of claim 3 wherein said service-brokering tools further comprise:

23                 Objects that can be used to generate private label interface-specific HTML.

24                 □

25       5. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein said service-brokering tools further comprise:

26                 a mechanism to publish a pending Partner record to the active record and inform

27                 all servers within a farm of load-balanced Web servers to re-load said active record.

28                 □

29       6. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein said service-brokering tools further comprise:

30                 a mechanism to synchronize partner information across said farm of load-

31                 balanced Web servers.

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2     7. An apparatus for connecting buyers and sellers of products and services comprising:

3                 means for network data sharing, wherein said means for network data sharing

4             allows said buyers and sellers to supply and access said network data;

5                 means for geographic radius searching, wherein said means for geographic radius

6             searching allows said buyers and sellers to search said network data within specified

7             geographic boundaries; and

8                 means for partner web site branding, wherein said means for partner web side

9             branding allows said buyers and sellers to form a community to facilitate the sharing of

10            said network data.

11

12     8. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein said means for network data sharing comprises:

13                 a data sharing engine for collecting, storing and controlling access to said network

14             data of said sellers;

15                 means for a subscription sales process for authorizing access of said sellers to said

16             data sharing engine;

17                 a request brokering engine for allowing said buyers to express detailed requests to

18             the sellers who have been authorized by said means for subscription sales process and

19             subsequently receive responses to said detailed requests;

20                 an object catalog manager for maintaining statistical information collected from

21             said data sharing engine and said request brokering engine; and

22                 means for a catalog synchronization process for updating and synchronizing the

23             statistical information maintained by said object catalog manager.

24

25     9. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein said means for geographic radius searching comprises:

26                 a GeoCode table containing data relating latitude and longitude information to

27             geographic locations;

28                 a GroupedGeoCode table containing an aggregated form of the data from said

29             GeoCode table; and

30                 means for searching comprising a database compiled from normalized data from

31             said GeoCode table and said GroupedGeoCode table.

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2     10. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein said means for partner web site branding comprises:

3                 a partner management tool for allowing a partner to edit a private label interface

4                 web site;

5                 a brand distribution service for publishing modifications made by said partner

6                 management tool; and

7                 a partner branding framework for generating web pages according to branding

8                 information from said brand distribution service.

9

10    11. The apparatus of claim 10 wherein said partner branding framework comprises:

11                 a web server with software having encapsulating technologies;

12                 programming objects for controlling the encapsulation of branding information by

13                 said software; and

14                 a template used as a foundation for all pages of said web server;

15

16    12. A method for connecting buyers and sellers of products and services comprising the steps

17         of:

18                 network data sharing;

19                 geographic radius searching; and

20                 partner web site branding.

21

22    13. The method of claim 12 wherein network data sharing comprises the steps of:

23                 using a data sharing engine to collect, store and control access to the network data

24         of said sellers;

25                 a subscription sales process for authorizing access of said sellers to said data

26         sharing engine;

27                 using a request brokering engine to allow said buyers to express detailed requests

28         to the sellers who have been authorized by said subscription sales process and

29         subsequently receive responses to said detailed requests;

30                 using an object catalog manager to maintain statistical information collected from

31         said data sharing engine and said request brokering engine; and

1                   a catalog synchronization process for updating and synchronizing the statistical  
2                   information maintained by said object catalog manager.

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4       14. The method of claim 13 wherein said subscription sales process comprises:  
5                   navigating to a private labeled interface;  
6                   clicking a registration hyperlink;  
7                   selecting a subscription package;  
8                   building a profile of a company;  
9                   categorizing the profile by selecting main categories and sub-categories from a  
10                  local taxonomy of the private labeled interface; and  
11                  creating an affiliation between the company and the private labeled interface.

12

13       15. The method of claim 12 wherein said geographic radius searching comprises the steps of:  
14                  relating latitude and longitude information to geographic locations;  
15                  aggregating information relating latitude and longitude to geographic locations in  
16                  order to generate unique latitude and longitude coordinates;  
17                  normalizing said aggregated information;  
18                  importing said normalized information into a database; and  
19                  searching said database.

20

21       16. The method of claim 12 wherein said partner web site branding comprises the steps of:  
22                  editing a private label interface web site using a partner management tool;  
23                  publishing modifications using a brand distribution service; and  
24                  generating web pages according to branding information from said brand  
25                  distribution service.

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27       17. A method for connecting buyers and sellers of products and services comprising:  
28                  maintaining a comprehensive on-line directory of sellers;  
29                  providing an RFP application for integration into a Web site of a partner;  
30                  co-branding said RFP application;  
31                  maintaining a searchable directory of companies for said partner;

1           providing an e-commerce infrastructure;  
2           marketing a private-labeled web site of said partner; and  
3           providing usage and revenue reports that will detail usage on the private-labeled  
4           web site.